

policy that will not be successful. Therefore, we should withdraw now. If that is the fact, I would agree we should withdraw now. So that is why I think we need to analyze this very point.

Last fall, a lot of people were worried about what was happening in Iraq. I certainly was. I visited Iraq in October. I visited Al Anbar. It was a very troubling report we received from the marines. It caused me great concern. Remarkably, Al Anbar region has shown, almost overnight, tremendous progress.

But let's go to the facts. The Congress asked General Jimmy Jones and his commission in May to independently evaluate Iraq when we did the funding for the surge. General Jimmy Jones's report dealt with the fundamentals we are facing. I asked him did he believe it was realistically possible that we could be successful in Iraq. And he said: Yes, sir. I asked him did a single member of his 20-member commission believe that we were doomed to failure in Iraq, and he looked around and asked his commission members, and none of them said that was their view. They all believed we had a realistic chance of success. I asked General Petraeus did he believe we had a realistic chance of success in Iraq, and he said, yes.

So I guess what I would say is, some say we do not. I would say the people—the generals who are leading the effort there—say we have a realistic chance of success. The independent commission we sent over there of 20 members unanimously believes we do. So I think we should base our opinion on the best information we have. As for me, I have to accept that.

I also factor into that rather dramatic improvements in the reduction of violence in Iraq, where within Baghdad we have seen a 70-percent reduction of civilian deaths and a 55-percent reduction of civilian deaths across the country of Iraq. That is very significant. It is a product of many different things. It is a product of the new strategy as well as the new troops we sent there.

So I have to say to my friends and colleagues in the Senate: Yes, this is a tough vote. Yes, we need to worry and agonize and think carefully about the challenges we are now facing, and we need to make rational decisions. Based on the information I have and the committee hearings I have attended in Armed Services, my 6 visits to Iraq, I think we should not precipitously withdraw. Well, they say, this is not a precipitous withdrawal, it is a deadline, and that is going to make the Iraqis do better. But it is not a deadline; it is a precipitous withdrawal. I mean I just have to tell you, let's deal with facts.

The Levin-Reed amendment says the Secretary of Defense shall commence the reduction of the number of U.S. forces in Iraq not later than 90 days after the enactment of this act. And

then it says: The Secretary of Defense shall complete the transition of the U.S. forces to a limited presence and missions by not later than 9 months after the enactment of this date. So this is basically a 9-month mandated withdrawal in Iraq, whether it creates instability and problems in places and puts our soldiers at greater risk or not. Unrelated to the facts on the ground, it is an absolute, mandated withdrawal.

Now, if we were doomed to failure, maybe this is what we ought to do, but I don't believe we are doomed to failure. I believe, as Senator LIEBERMAN said, there are a number of things that can cause us to feel better, and General Petraeus has certainly infused our effort with more leadership and effectiveness and purpose. His tactics utilizing counterinsurgency principles seem to have made some real progress.

For example, he told us he is embedding his soldiers with the local people and the local forces to an extraordinary degree, compared to what we have done before. As a matter of fact, I asked him about that. I said: What are you doing differently? He seemed to, I have to say, appreciate the question because he had been asked so many other things. But he is doing things differently, and he explained some of the things he is doing. We are embedding our soldiers with their soldiers. They are living with them. They are in the neighborhoods. As a result, we are receiving more information, and the number of caches of weapons that have been seized so far this year put us on a pace to double the number of weapons and munitions seizures that we have achieved this year, doubling the previous rate. He said in his mind that may have something to do with the fact that attacks have been down and the number of IED attacks have dropped 37 percent. He didn't overpromise or declare that. He said it might have something to do with that, that we are obtaining twice as many caches of weapons and seizing those as a direct result of more and better information from the people of Iraq.

So I would also join my colleague, Senator MCCAIN, who certainly knows something about war firsthand, in concluding that the limited presence mandated in this amendment, the Reed-Levin amendment, that says that the mission of our forces that are left in Iraq can only be for the following purposes: No. 1, protecting U.S. and coalition personnel and infrastructure—base security, defending our bases—No. 2, training, equipping, and providing logistic support to the Iraqi security forces; and No. 3, engaging in targeted—this is a legal mandate—targeted counterterrorism operations against al-Qaida, al-Qaida-affiliated groups, and other international terrorist organizations. That is all they can do. As Senator MCCAIN said, asking this question: Are they going to wear T-shirts that say: I am an al-Qaida, I am a Shia, or a Sunni terrorist; I am a Baathist warrior, and we can only

shoot at those—use force against those who wear the al-Qaida T-shirts? This is not a practical, realistic directive to the U.S. military. We are not capable of deciding how to deploy the forces we have there. We are just not capable. This is a bunch of politicians—that is all we are—doing our best effort to serve the people. We don't have to be bound—I certainly agree—by a report from a general or the President.

We can act if we choose to act. But we need to ask ourselves, are we going to dismiss the testimony of our top generals and the independent Jones commission about the progress that is being made and the realistic chance of success that exists? In fact, I think it may be a realistic fact that one reason Osama bin Laden is all over the television apparently in the last few days is because he is getting worried. The Sunni support area of Al Anbar in Iraq has turned against him and his people, and they are fighting against him and have devastated much of their capability in the Al Anbar region—a direct change from what I was told last October when that was not occurring. We are working with local police, local mayors, local tribal leaders, and that is yielding progress to a degree we have not seen before in Iraq. It appears to be a model that can lead us more successfully than trying to meet with a bunch of politicians in downtown Baghdad and trying to reach an accord that is going to affect something in Fallujah or Samarra or Mosul. Washington, DC, can't affect Alabama or Nebraska very well.

But this country is not capable of issuing orders that can impact successfully the daily lives in these provinces and small towns. That is a product of the new nature of that Government and the lack of maturity it has. So we are using different tactics that seem to be working.

Well, we have said our military is being damaged and our morale is bad and we have real problems there. Certainly, we have had a tremendous amount of our military personnel there, and they have performed with the greatest professionalism. They are well trained, well disciplined, well equipped, they know how to use the equipment with which they have trained, and they are performing in a magnificent way. They are at risk every day and they are doing their jobs effectively.

For example, a few days ago, a group came to visit my office from Alabama. They were called Veterans for Freedom. It was made up of Alabama Army National Guardsmen and Army Reservists. I had the honor of being an Army Reservist for 10 years. I never served in combat, but I am honored to have been one of them. These are citizen soldiers. They recently returned from being mobilized in Iraq. These soldiers were all senior noncommissioned officers. They had demobilized and were back at their civilian jobs. They asked for a couple days off to visit the offices of Alabama's congressional delegation. They